

OUT THERE / OVER THERE

Out There. Over There.

Over Here. Out Here.

Have I been here before? – it feels familiar.

But where is it? Where is there? Where are we?

We need to move. But where are we going?

Sorry, I'm Rambling; dwelling in an act of reminiscence and recollection.

In this space, we are travellers, passing one another as we drift across multiple landscapes on an expedition spanning transglobal markers, bounding from one location to another in quick succession. A whirlwind of sensations vibrates within, as we traverse back and forth between memories and moments, the past and the present, as time slips from its regular tick. This space is rendered transitional as a by-product of its unknowable geographies, indeterminable temporality, or perhaps because of its interstitial existence between two reference points: here and there, then and now.

We are not concerned here with displacement, but distance.

The peaks of layered photographs take precedence from the prehistoric practice of the 'Cairn', a man-made method of piling rocks to landmark and distinguish trails across unidentifiable landscapes, assisting in navigation for travellers. Valentina Schulte's crystalline objects reflect a similar intent, each monument propelling us into a foreign place, a different time, marking paths for us to explore in the new landscape. The proximity barrier collapses as we ramble, former moments are no longer 'out there', 'over there', but here and active in existing time. Without knowing – really knowing – where we are, slippages occur between remembered place and actual, present place, concaving as part of the same earthly continuum. The mind excavates the recesses of our memory, reviving a sense of familiarity and connectedness.

Remember this? The gushing swirl of water being expelled from the heights of a great waterfall in the depths of the Australian bush, the mist cooling your body as you listen to the roar of water and gaze toward the sky, squinting as the sun assaults the periphery of your eyes.

Or this: Looking out across the vastness of earthy canopies from an ancient structure. The heat echoing in the rings of cicadas. You can feel the abrasion of rock, coarse against your hands as you decline further down the peak into the chasm below, surrounded in every direction by trees, rock, and dust.

Nostalgia seeps in.

Expelling an edifying power that is entirely palpable. Collective sensations form a microcosm of shared knowledge and experiences with the natural world; all resonant of the sublime when viewed from the concrete entropy of our lookout.

Schulte's topographic space resembles a globalised map, each cairn a pin in the surface. This world, much like our own, is deeply rooted in the intensification of relations, linking distant localities together in a fast-paced consciousness of hyper-connectivity and homogenised narratives. But, instead of viewing these locations through a glowing screen, what we have become accustomed to, Schulte has instead engaged in an analogous process, wanting us to experience these images in three-dimensionality. This obvious trace of intervention and agency at the hand of the artist herself reveals that the phenomenological experience of place is just as important as the material that emerges from it. This provocation prevails as an attentive stillness or slowness, offering us sites of contemplation of natural ephemera across the globe.

While there is a lack of sentimentality in the way each image is recorded, Schulte's photographic practice is ultimately an act of remembrance, the personalised fragments set aside for contemplating distant places; concealed from us in Schulte's temporal lobe. The manipulation of the photographs and their groupings provide an intimate glimpse into Schulte's physical and psychological map-making, lending way to understanding her curiosity towards our connection to landscape and our innate inability to full capture – reach – hold – see – what is 'out there'. We are limited by the lens of the camera, or our eyes, and the allusive otherness that nature often beholds. This curiosity demonstrates itself through the multiplicitous points of view in each Cairnic structure, oscillating between the micro and macro, intimate and infinite.

In Western systems, nature is seen in opposition to civilisation; nature is where humans aren't. 'Out there' or 'over there' is consequently synonymous of separation, somewhere out of reach, inaccessible or beyond comprehension. In nature, this is often referred to as 'the wilderness,' a visualisation reflected in Schulte's photography. The wilderness is considered unoccupied, uninfected by civilization, a refuge in the polluted sea of urban industrialisation. Yet: in his 1996 essay *'The Trouble with Wilderness'* [1] William Cronon criticises this reduction, stating that the wilderness idea is a culturally and historically-relative human creation; we are not removed from one another, but are fundamentally interwoven. Whilst Schulte's photographs are uninhabited, they do resonate a palpable human presence. The natural world often alive in our very human memories. We are not separate from nature, and such rationalisation remains problematic when thinking of Indigenous histories imbued with a strong connection to land. Schulte counters these reductions by acknowledging the traditional custodians of each site captured in her photographs through entitling her works with the Indigenous names and language of each place.

There is something uneasy about Schulte's photographs.

Cue the existential crisis.

We have now entered a geological period – the Anthropocene – in which humans have directly affected the substrata of their earthly reality. Our landscape is in a chronic state of flux, renegotiation and asymmetry. Adam Trexler in *'Anthropocene Fictions'* [2] makes the point that the geologic – nature – is something we live within, not simply something 'out there' that we study from a far. We are feeling these ruptures, living these changes. It is felt in the echoes of decay, the disappearance of species, and in the all too recognisable roar of bushfires. The landscapes we have come to know, those in Schulte's works for example, will never be the same. Cairns, serving their role as signifiers have also been used since prehistory as memorials and for burials. This seems uncomfortably fitting. Schulte's photographs depict a sanitised nature, a final offering of a utopian vision, memorialised and worshipped, before it all changes.

We can't see it yet – the future – the vastness – it is out there, over there.

The nostalgia is our new addiction, as we turn to avoid the unknown.

I think I've been here before, or have I?

But we will never be here again.

It will change.

Written by Independent Curator,
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[1] Cronon, W. (1996) "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature". *Environmental History*, Vol. 1, No. 1: 7-28.

[2] Trexler, A. (2015) *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.